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IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A longitudinal plunging unit for the transmission of torque in a drive assembly, comprising:

a profiled sleeve {21} with circumferentially distributed, longitudinally extending first ball grooves {22};

a profiled journal {11} with circumferentially distributed, longitudinally extending second ball grooves {12};

balls {31} which are arranged in groups of pairs of first and second ball grooves {12, 22};

a ball cage {41} which is arranged between the profiled sleeve {21} and the profiled journal {11} and fixes the balls {31} in their positions relative to one another; and

a spring means which are is supported on at least one axial stop {42, 43} and designed in such a way that, in an unloaded condition, the ball cage {42} is held at a distance from the at least one axial stop {42, 43}.

2.-17. (cancelled)

18. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein the spring comprises a first spring which is arranged between the ball cage and a first axial stop.

19. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 18, wherein the spring further comprises a second spring which is arranged between the ball cage and a second axial stop, wherein the first axial stop and the second axial stop are arranged on opposed sides of the ball cage.

20. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the axial stops is associated with the profiled journal.

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21. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein at least one of the axial stops is associated with the profiled journal.

22. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the axial stops is associated with the profiled sleeve.

23. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein at least one of the axial stops is associated with the profiled sleeve.

24. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein the first axial stop is associated with the profiled shaft and the second axial stop is associated with the profiled sleeve.

25. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 24, wherein first the axial stop is arranged at an inner end of the profiled journal, and the second axial stop is arranged at an open end of the sleeve.

26. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein the at least one axial stop is a securing ring which is axially fixed to the profiled sleeve or to the profiled journal.

27. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein the at least one axial stop is a stop sleeve which is axially supported relative to the profiled sleeve or the profiled journal.

28. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein the first and second springs are pretensioned.

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29. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein the first and second springs are of different lengths.

30. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein the first spring or the second spring is a helical spring.

31. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein the spring comprises at least one helical spring surrounding a portion of the profiled journal and positioned between said profiled journal and said profiled sleeve with radial play.

32. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 18, wherein the first spring comprises a greatest outer diameter which is smaller than a smallest inner diameter of the profiled sleeve in the region of the ball grooves.

33. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein the first or second spring comprises a greatest outer diameter which is smaller than a smallest inner diameter of the profiled sleeve in the region of the ball grooves.

34. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 18, wherein the first spring comprises a smallest inner diameter which is greater than a greatest outer diameter of the profiled journal in the region of the ball grooves.

35. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 19, wherein the first or second spring comprises a smallest inner diameter which is greater than a greatest outer diameter of the profiled journal in the region of the ball grooves.

36. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein the spring is firmly connected to the ball cage.

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37. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein a group of balls positioned in a common radial plane comprises a greater diameter than the balls of the remaining groups of balls.

38. (new) A longitudinal plunging unit according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the ball grooves of the profiled sleeve or the profiled journal, is arranged outside a region of the regularly distributed remaining ball grooves, wherein the ball grooves of the other of the profiled sleeve or profiled journal are regularly distributed across the circumference.